

Rebecca Catto⁷

The Role of Religion in Integration - Youth Integration⁸

Firstly, thank you very much for the opportunity to present to you today. I am delighted to be here. I am Dr Rebecca Catto, and I am a sociologist, specializing in religion. I work at the Centre for the Social Relations at Coventry University in the UK. My previous role, which I just finished over a month ago, was as Research Associate on the Religion and Society Programme, a national research programme in the UK, which invested in 21 projects about youth and religion specifically within a wider group of 75 projects. I led on the Youth and Religion phase of the programme. Last year I completed my own project, called the Young Atheists Research Project, which is to be found on Facebook as well. My research assistant Dr Janet Eccles and I interviewed young people in the UK today who self-identify as atheists.

So, unsurprisingly, I am most familiar with the British context and I will draw upon this previous research in my presentation. It is a pleasure to be invited to talk about this timely topic. As we have seen, there is concern about young people in particular in Europe at the moment. We had the 2005 riots in France, from the Paris *banlieue* and then radiating out, and then the 2011 riots in England and the Madrid protest in 2012, which then turned into something of a riot as well. So there is this public concern with young people, especially in the worsening economic climate that we have across Europe.

The key points I want to make are as follows:

- (i) Youth and Europe are both diverse categories. Nonetheless, common patterns can be found.
- (ii) Europe has a Christian heritage and is now much more plural. Young people are at a stage of transition and growing up in a new era of global connectedness.
- (iii) European nation states have been developing policies in order to manage diversity and foster greater integration. Contemporary policy concerns in public spheres regarding a lack of integration are related specifically to Islam in many European nation states following internationally broadcast, violent acts committed by some young Muslim men and there is also a relationship with immigration.
- (iv) Religion's role - in relation to integration - is varied and disputed. There is a tension between solidarity and conflict, bridging and bonding social capital, if you will. Lack of affiliation to institutional religion does not appear to be meaning a lack of values or beliefs. So, I want to say that we do have to think about what we are wanting or expecting young people to integrate

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⁸ On the basis of the lecture delivered at the conference entitled "Cultural Identity: the Role of Religion in Europe" (25th April 2013)

into. No one has a single fixed community or identity. Finally, the context matters.

Youth

Generation X is defined very loosely as those born between the 1960s and the early 1980s - the generation after the post-World-War-II “Baby-boomers”. There has been quite a lot written about Generation X: e.g. Douglas Coupland’s novel ‘Generation X’ or Flory & Miller ‘Generation X Religion’ also based on US research. But, I do not really want to talk about Generation X very much today. I think they are too old. I want to talk about Generation Y, who is the generation after that. So these are people who were born between the 1980s and 2000s and are still young now. They have also been called the Millennials or the Web 2.0 Generation. Young people are at a transitory stage between childhood and adulthood, and we get from youth studies a picture of threats and vulnerability emerging: a tension between structure and agency. Young men are frequently seen as a threat to the common good. Yet young people require particular protections. They often espouse a sense of individual choice and responsibility, but the circumstances of their birth: region, socio-economic status etc. remain the best predictor of their future.

Jeffrey and McDowell (2004) point out that notions of youth and adulthood are defined differently across communities, cultures, and societies. Hence, they ask whether efforts to map different patterns or pathways to adulthood onto geographical divisions are unnecessary or impossible, but they do acknowledge regional variation. So, then, perhaps it does make sense to talk about young people in Europe more specifically.

Europe and Religion

Looking at the title proposed for this presentation, my initial thought was integration into what? What are we talking about when we talk about Europe, especially in relation to religion specifically?

Europe is historically Christian, as we have discussed already quite a bit today, yet characterized now by greater diversity and loosening connections between church and nation (Catto and Woodhead 2011). Grace Davie places European religion in its global context highlighting how it is internally varied, yet sufficiently similar to be contrasted with the rest of the world. “Within Europe there are – she writes – variations on a discernible theme, namely a relatively low level of religious practice and creedal assent alongside higher levels of both residual attachment and nominal belief.” (Davie 2002: 138).

There has been a decline in belonging to historic churches. Simultaneously, there has been a small growth in the number of atheists, a rise in the unaffiliated, and a rise in those self-identifying with world religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Sikhism, and these groups tend to have younger profiles. A lot of youth and religion related research in Europe has focused upon young

Muslims in particular given the terrorists activities undertaken by some young Muslim men, most notably the March 2004 Madrid bombings, the July 2005 bombings in London, and the December 2010 bomb attack in Stockholm.

Perhaps 'the European perspective' involves a concern with democracy, rights, including freedom of religion, national social security structures, a Christian heritage, increasing economic instability, and a concern with border control security. So this is the kind of context that young people are growing up in and migrating into.

Religion and Integration in Europe

But what about religion and integration in Europe more specifically? Research generally seems to indicate that religion and integration are linked. Putnam & Campbell (2010) have developed a thesis based upon their American research that the positive effect of religion –which they find – upon volunteering can be accounted for by religious service attendance and the social networks that go along with that. Putnam and his colleagues distinguish between bridging and bonding social capital, arguing that close networks within a religious group do not necessarily contribute towards wider relationships in a society. So that was based on American research; but, what about the situation in Europe and for young people in particular?

Young People and Religion in Europe

My Centre for Social Relations colleague Dr Carola Leicht ran a preliminary analysis, cross-tabulating responses from 15 to 29 year olds who indicated in the 2008 wave of the European Value Study that they are religious or not religious. She cross-tabulated this with whether they do any voluntary work, and, if you compare the expected count with the actual count in the cross-tab, you see that the numbers differ, and these differences in the numbers are significant (see Table 1.). We would expect 1720 participants who are religious to engage in voluntary work, but it is actually only 1592.

Table 1⁹

are you a religious person (Q28) * does participant do any voluntary work? Crosstabulation^a

			does participant do any voluntary work?		Total
			no voluntary work	voluntary work	
are you a religious person (Q28)	religious person	Count	7547	1592	9139
		Expected Count	7419.0	1720.0	9139.0
	not religious person	Count	2919	768	3687
		Expected Count	2993.1	693.9	3687.0
	convinced atheist	Count	671	222	893
		Expected Count	724.9	168.1	893.0
Total	Count	11137	2582	13719	
	Expected Count	11137.0	2582.0	13719.0	

a. age (recoded into 3 intervals) = 15-29 years

9 Data from the European Values Study 2008 Wave courtesy of Dr Carola Leicht, Senior Research Assistant, Centre for Social Relations, Coventry University

Similarly, Dr Leicht also ran a univariate analysis looking at the question ‘How important is God in your life?’, with one on the scale being not at all and ten being very much (see Figure 1.). We looked at whether there was any difference between 15 and 29 year olds who do or do not do any voluntary work in how important they report God is in their lives. What we see is that participants who do not do any voluntary work actually indicate a higher mean in this variable (6.39), hence they believe more in God than participants who do voluntary work (5.70). However, we have to be careful because the cell sizes are very different (11 479 participants do not do any voluntary work) and Levene’s test for equality of variance indicates that the way participants answer this question is different in the two groups.

Figure 1¹⁰



Now we have to be very cautious about these figures and these are very preliminary. Yet, from what we can see with these two different types of analyses, there does seem to be a negative relationship. If participants indicate that they are religious, they are apparently less likely to do voluntary work, and this was true across cohorts with no discernible age effect.

Here the relationship between religion and volunteering or civic engagement is taken as a proxy for integration (which we can argue about). Doing unpaid voluntary work is certainly not synonymous with integration and these measures are simplistic. But these early findings are nonetheless interesting. We cannot say what the overall relationship between religion and volunteering or civic engagement in Europe is, but there does seem to be one, whether positive or negative.

The European-Commission-funded project REDCo asked “Religion and Education: a Contribution to Dialogue or a Factor of Conflict in Transforming Societies in European Countries?” So we see in the question of the project

10 Data from the European Values Study 2008 Wave courtesy of Dr Carola Leicht, Senior Research Assistant, Centre for Social Relations, Coventry University

title the same idea of a tension between whether is religion good or is it bad for integration. For this Europe-wide survey, the project team surveyed 14 to 15 year olds in schools in Estonia, Russia, Norway, Germany, the Netherlands, France, England and Spain. In a policy presentation to the Commission from the research, team member Professor Jean-Paul Willaime stated: “the adolescents we surveyed confirm the phenomenon of young people’s indifference to religious institutions: half of them say they have no religious affiliation. Religion is of secondary importance to them. Only a minority of students, comprised principally of two religions (Catholics and Muslims), distinguish themselves from the others by the intensity of their religious beliefs. Concerning the question of tolerance and the ability to enter into dialogue, we must once again stress that there does not seem to be any overt hostility between young people disinterested in religion and people for whom it plays a major role. Religion is of no concern to a large number of the adolescents surveyed. Despite this fact, only a small minority of them has adopted categorically anticlerical or antireligious attitudes. On the contrary, these adolescents emphasise that respecting other people’s beliefs is important. They don’t believe that any of the various religious traditions has a monopoly on absolute truth. This indifference and this tendency to see the situation in relative terms are as important as, if not more important than, the ability to exchange opinions and the knowledge acquired of other people’s religions in accounting for the generally relaxed approach students take towards religion. We can thus speak of a type of passive tolerance.” (Willaime 2008: 25)

Generally overall, this might sound like good news (though perhaps not for religious institutions). Is there more concern with the relationship between religion and integration for young people than is actually warranted by the reality of the situation in Europe?

More comparative research and analysis are needed but there has been an increase in qualitative in-depth studies including the study of young peoples’ beliefs and values outside of formal religion settings, and it is this type of research to which I now turn. For example, Alana Harris (2010) finds pilgrimage to Lourdes to be popular amongst young people and the popularity of the World Youth Day organized by the Vatican illustrates the thirst for some form of engagement with Christianity amongst young people in contemporary Europe as well as far beyond Europe.

A lot of young Europeans may be “unchurched”, but not entirely non-religious or atheist. Nonetheless, in his message ahead of the 26th World Youth Day in Madrid in 2011, Pope Benedict XVI acknowledged the challenges facing young people in relation to their faith today. He said: “Yet some Christians allow themselves to be seduced by secularism or attracted by religious currents that draw them away from faith in Jesus Christ. There are others who, while not yielding to these enticements, have simply allowed their faith to grow cold, with inevitable negative effects on their moral lives.”

So here the former pope is certainly drawing a connection between religiosity and moral behaviour.

In research conducted as part of the Religion and Society Programme, Ward and Dunlop (2011) worked with young Polish people settled in Britain who appear to have a varied relationship with Catholicism, related to their host context and to their upbringing. Some respondents looked to the local Catholic church for community and support, whilst others appreciated the opportunity to live in a society where there is less public emphasis on Christian practice.

New research is also finding that young people are engaging via mobile technologies and new social media forging new online communities of belonging, and choosing their own sources of religious authority. Lots of young Muslims are engaging online transnationally to protest against Islamophobia and communicate their perspectives, and this is what Van Zoonen and her team (2011) found from their Religion and Society research. Young Sikhs are learning more about their religion from the internet and from each other than they are necessarily from their elders and from the Gurdwara (Singh 2012). But, as Mia Lövhelm (2007) has found analysing online religious forums in Sweden, young people are not necessarily engaging with a diverse range of people or views online. There was optimism when research on religion and the internet started, with the idea of great cosmopolitanism and different interactions happening online. However, what the empirical work is now finding is that people still tend to engage with likeminded others, and there is a risk of echo chambers online: cosmopolitanism cannot be assumed.

So these are some reminders of the religious growth that is happening amongst young people in Europe, as well as the declining church attendance. They also serve as a reminder of the religion's intensifying interconnectedness with the rest of the world through communication and migration. Of course religions continue to engage in a lot of youth work throughout Europe, and particularly Catholicism and Protestantism play a large role in the delivery of education and welfare, though there are arguments over the integrating or isolating role religiously-based schools fulfil.

Conclusions

(i) Young people are living through new circumstances. In the current economic downturn they are disproportionately affected in terms of employment and have a particular concern about the future; and hence they have a particular concern about civil action as O'Toole and Gale (2010) have found in their research with young people from ethnic minorities in Britain. (ii) Particularly in the West, including Europe, young people of the Web 2.0. generation immersed in social networking are creating new religious and spiritual spaces and identities. And yet, political party membership, trade union membership and voting in national elections are all on the decline

in Europe especially amongst the young. Such decline does not necessarily mean though a decline in civil participation or values.

(iii) Religion's relation with integration for young people in Europe is complex and difficult to predict. It is mediated by context, ethnicity, and other factors such as socio-economic status. Perhaps European nation states have to reflect further upon what integration means in our globalizing, destabilizing societies, and perhaps we have to work more to meet young people where they are as they are seemingly less likely to be engaging with traditional institutions – be they religious or secular – in what is becoming for many a moment of crisis.